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ABSTRACT

Noting that the format imposed upon a debate can affect the presentation of information provided to audiences and that presidential campaign debates have become a significant event in the election process, this paper contends that it is important to analyze various formats and to consider carefully formats that are developed for future encounters of this kind. Specifically, the paper offers a comparative analysis of the formats of all seven 1980 presidential debates--the Republican primary debates held in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Illinois, and Texas, and the two Democratic-Republican postconvention debates held in Maryland and Ohio. Based on this analysis, the paper offers the following recommendations: (1) the events need to be designed so as to minimize the involvement of panelists beyond what is necessary to pose propositions; (2) panelists should be discouraged from using intimidating or multi-faceted questions, using instead short, simple, direct questions; (3) the informal format can provide the least opportunity for a candidate to hide or to evade or ignore complex issues; (4) a formal structure offers a candidate assurance of equal speaking opportunities with his or her opponents; and (5) allowing the moderator to introduce various propositions formulated in advance is a way of improving debate format. (FL)

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FORM AND SUBSTANCE:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE FORMATS

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FORM AND SUBSTANCE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE FORMATS

Susan A. Hellweg and Steven L. Phillips

The presidential debates have become an important part of American politics. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that these debates are viewed by a considerable number of people[1] and have an important impact upon voting decisions.[2] The fact that they have acquired such importance has lead political scientists, mass media specialists, and communication researchers to study them in great detail.[3]

Since the debates appear to influence voters in making up their minds about candidates, much has been written about their formats, specifically concerning their ability to allow for the adequate dissemination of appropriate information to the American public and their ability to provide a fair vehicle to the candidates who are endeavoring to convey their political messages.[4] A variety of recommendations have been made in regard to how the format of these debates could be improved, with no particular consensus on an "ideal" format in sight.[5]

The purpose of this article is to provide a comparative analysis of the 1980 presidential debate formats. All seven televised debates will be incorporated in this discussion, specifically the Republican primary debates held in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Illinois and Texas, and the two Democratic-Republican post-convention debates in Baltimore and Cleveland.

The televised presidential debates of 1960, 1976, and 1980 have provided the American public an alternative source of information about the candidates. These events have allowed the public to view opposing candidates in a single context simultaneously. Through these debates, the voters have had the opportunity to see the candidates for an extended period of time; only through television programs such as "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation," or "Issues and Answers" does the public otherwise have the opportunity to see a candidate discuss his positions at length; nightly news media coverage does not afford the viewer this opportunity. The debates, however, have allowed the public to compare candidates.

In addition, these debates have not only served as a means to inform the electorate, but they probably have also elevated the quality of public dialogue. From the standpoint of campaign expenditures, these debates have most likely given the candidates the opportunity to speak to the largest and most attentive audience at the least expense; as the cost of campaign traveling increases, these debates will become even more important in their function.

A debate may be defined as a type of discourse involving two or more persons who offer competing positions in regard to a particular issue or issues. This discourse normally involves the affirmation and denial of a proposition in some or all respects by contenders through the use of supporting argumentation. In designing the format for a televised Presidential debate, a number of important factors must be taken into consideration. Each of these factors greatly influences the quality of such debates and has particularly affected the three series of presidential debates held since 1960.

First, debates do not serve the public well when they simply encourage candidates to "score" against one another, rather than actually debate. This tendency in past televised debates has resulted in part from the formats which have made the events appear like "boxing matches" and in part because of the way in which the media has covered them. In an attempt to interpret these events, the media has sometimes relied upon a "winner-loser" orientation.

Another potential problem occurs when the debate format encourages short answers which resound "worn commonplaces" heard frequently in the campaign.[6] Often absent from these responses are well-developed and thoughtful arguments. The advantage, of course, to the candidate who can use packaged commonplaces effectively is that he can deliver his messages rapidly in polished form, using various tested appeals.

The role of the panelists provides an additional source of potential difficulty. If the panelists simply pose propositions from which the contenders can develop arguments, then a true debate occurs. The tendency in past presidential debates has been for the panelists to enter somewhat of a third party role, taking up quite a bit of time in asking questions, directing some hostility toward the candidates in the content of their questioning, and choosing questions which do not invite debate. On a few occasions, panelists' questions have seemed more a reflection of the interest of a particular panelist than general electoral issues. Paneliests have frequently been guilty of asking multiple questions within the framework of a single question, making it difficulty for a candidate to respond. The debates have often seemed more like press conferences than debates, with panelists asking candidates questions and candidates responding to the questions, rather than debating one another.

The panelists have served as agenda setters for some of the debates, often pressuring the candidates with hostile or one-sided questions into submissive responses, acting as though their role was to "unmask" the candidates. In addition, the line of questioning has at times taken somewhat of a transitory approach, rather than a view toward long-range perspectives.

On a more technical level, there are format considerations which relate to speaker time, speaker rotation, the use of opening and closing statements, the use of rebuttals and restatement of questions, and the use of notes by the contenders. Although these considerations may seem trivial to the casual observer, the candidates properly consider them to be vitally important. Obviously, a candidate must adapt quickly to the constraints of the format. This involves realizing the consequences of the particular debate format chosen. In terms of speaker rotation, for example, the candidate must consider his opportunity to defend his own position, to point out the weaknesses of the arguments advanced by his opponent, to generate his own agenda--all of which must be accomplished with agility and proper tactics.

The 1980 presidential campaign offered an expanded version of the 1960 and 1976 debates. In this case, there was an effort to provide the American public with primary debates, as well as post-convention presidential debates.

There were no Democratic primary debates (due to President Carter's insistence that his foreign affairs responsibilities prevented his participation), but five Republican televised primary debates did materialize.

The Republicans, with seven viable candidates announcing their intention to run for the Presidency (in contrast to three Democratic contenders) endeavored to assist voters in making distinctions between candidates (and offer them nationwide visibility) through a series of five televised primary debates between January and April 1980 in various American cities. This was an important decision because the incumbent President was a Democrat, and some of the seven Republican contenders were relatively unknown to a nationwide audience.

Republican primary debates were televised from Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Illinois, and Texas, with some, but not all, of the candidates appearing in each. All seven candidates appeared in at least one of these speaking events. The general aim, of course, for each of these candidates was to stand out among the others and yet participate in solidifying the Republican Party.[7] The second, fourth, and fifth of these televised events were sponsored by the League of Women Voters; the other two were sponsored by local concerns.

Two post-convention presidential debates were sponsored by the League of Women Voters, the first between Republican candidate Ronald Reagan and Independent candidate John Anderson in Baltimore (President Carter withdrawing from the debate) and the second between Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter and Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in Cleveland (Anderson being eliminated from the debate because of an insufficient ranking in the political polls).[8]

The Iowa Debate

The Iowa Republican Debate, the first in the series of five televised primary debates, was held on January 5, 1980 at the Des Moines Civic Center. Six Republican candidates participated in the event: Congressman Philip Crane, Senator Howard Baker, Congressman John Anderson, former Governor John Connally, Senator Robert Dole, and former Ambassador George Bush. James Gannon of the Des Moines Register and Tribune served as the moderator. The panelists included two local journalists and two national journalists: Richard Doak of the Des Moines Tribune, Mary Gorgry of the Washington Star, George Anthan of the Des Moines Register and Tribune, and Walter Mears of the Associated Press.

The two-hour debate featured the following four-segment question and answer format: (1) In the initial segment, panelists took turns asking the candidates questions, with the first candidate getting two minutes to answer, then each of the other five candidates getting one minute to respond or comment on the question. (2) In the second segment, audience members asked the candidates questions, with each candidate getting one minute to respond. (3) In the third segment, the audience members asked questions of single candidates, with the candidate addressed getting one minute to respond. (4) In the final segment, each of the six candidates were given the opportunity for a three-minute closing statement.

Ten questions were posed by the panelists in the initial eighty-minute segment. Four of the six candidates were initial respondents for two questions, while the other two candidates did so only once (Dole and Bush). The second and third segments (audience questions) lasted approximately twenty minutes, with two questions asked by audience members of all the

candidates and eight questions asked of individual candidates. Dole and Bush were provided with one more audience member question in the third segment than the others. The final segment, consisting of closing statements by the candidates, lasted eighteen minutes.

Generally speaking, all the candidates were treated equally, with the exception of the Dole-Bush questioning noted for the first and third segments.

Because the additional questions to Bush and Dole in the third segment compensated for the first segment, the total available speaking time for each candidate was the same--eighteen minutes. Candidates were rotated in terms of speaking order, so that the initial respondent was different through each group of six questions.

The format provided for a relatively formal presentation, although there was some levity evidenced. No audience applause was permitted in response to candidate comments. The candidates sat behind tables (three at a table), so as to appear as members of a panel discussion rather than individual speakers. The moderator was positioned between the two groups of candidates. The four journalists faced the candidates and the moderator, with their backs to the audience.

Developing an effective debate format around six candidates is, of course, difficult. Because of the inflexible structure of the debate and the routine questioning, it was difficult to distinguish the Republican candidates, who were not only trying to stand apart from the others, but also aiming to solidify their party. The allowance for some levity and informality did provide for some escape from traditional "packaged"

expression without sacrificing the serious intent of the debate itself. The number of questions raised did afforda wide variety of topics to be discussed, so that a comparison (at least to some degree) of the candidates was possible.

The New Hampshire Debate

The New Hampshire Republican Debate, the second in the series of five televised primary debates, was held on February 20, 1980 at Manchester Central High School. All seven Republican candidates participated in the event: John Anderson, John Connally, Philip Crane, George Bush, Howard Baker, Robert Dole, and Ronald Reagan. News correspondent Howard K. Smith served as the moderator and chief panelist. Two journalists served as the other panelists for this debate: Eileen Shanahan of the Washington Star and Joseph Kraft, nationally syndicated columnist.

The ninety-minute debate offered the following three-segment question and answer format: (1) In the initial segment, the two panelists took turns posing questions to the candidates, with the first candidate having two minutes to answer, then each of the other six candidates getting one minute to respond or comment on the question. (2) In the second segment, each candidate received one question from the audience and was given one and a half minutes to respond. (3) In the final segment, each of the seven candidates was given one minute for a closing statement.

Seven questions were posed in the initial debate segment, each candidate getting an opportunity to respond first one time. This segment lasted approximately one hour. The second portion of the televised event ran for approximately twenty-three minutes. The final segment last approximately seven minutes.

The treatment given to the candidates appeared to be equal in terms of available speaking time and speaking rotation. Each candidate had an opportunity to speak for ten and a half minutes, eight in the first segment, one and a half in the second segment, and one in the final segment.

While the New Hampshire debate format was similar to that employed in the Iowa event, candidates had considerable less time to convey their positions, ten and a half minutes as opposed to eighteen minutes. This was obviously due to the inclusion of an additional candidate (Reagan) and reduced broadcast time, ninety minutes as compared to two hours.

Once again, it was difficult to see clear distinctions among the Republican candidates. However, the number of questions employed in the debate did allow for a range of topics to be discussed, giving the viewers many areas to consider candidate potential. This debate served primarily as a "commerical" for the Republican party, much in the way that the Iowa event did.

The South Carolina Debate

The South Carolina Debate, the third in the series of televised primary debates, was held on February 28, 1980 in the Longstreet Theater on the campus of the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Four Republican candidates participated in the event: Ronald Reagan, Howard Baker, John Connally, and George Bush. Jim Lehrer of the Public Broadcasting System moderated the affair, which included four panelists (again, two local journalists and two national journalists): Jack Germond of the Washington Star, Lee Bandy of The State and The Columbian Record, William Raspberry of the Washington Post, and Kurt Krell of The Columbian Record.

In contrast to all of the other 1980 debates analyzed here, the South Carolina debate featured the participants in a setting that approximated a boxing ring, with the audience surrounding them and successively elevated. Two of the cardidates sat on opposite sides of the stage, the other with two on the third side all evenly spaced with regard to one another. The journalists divided evenly and sat in the promimity of the two of the corners with tables in front of them; the moderator sat with a small lecturn and table in front of him between the groups of panelists. The participants were positioned essentially in a circular pattern. The appearance was somewhat informal; the intent seemed to be to make the event seem conversational, rather than adversarial.

The following four-segment question and answer format was imposed: (1) In the initial segment, the journalists asked the candidates questions, with the first respondent given two minutes to answer and subsequent candidates given one minute to repond or comment on the question (as was the case in the Iowa and New Hampshire debates). (2) In the second segment, each panelist directed a different question to each of the four contenders, the candidates having one minute to respond. (3) In the third segment, the moderator addressed follow-up questions to the candidates (two successively to each candidate, with each candidate having one minute to respond. (4) In the final segment, the four candidates had the opportunity to offer two-minute closing statements.

Eight questions were asked in the initial segment. Each candidate was the initial respondent for two of these questions. Sixteen questions were

posed in the second segment, four by each journalist, with one from each journalist to each candidate. The third segment featured eight follow-up questions, with two for each of the four contenders. Finally, all candidates made a closing statement. A total of eighteen minutes of speaking time was provided to each candidate, as was the case in the Iowa debate.

No audience questions were utilized in the South Carolina debate. Follow-up questions, however, were an additional feature. The questions posed in the South Carolina debate had slightly more intimidating and personalized overtones than those in the Iowa debate, such as the questioning directed at Bush about his handling of the New Hampshire debate. The follow-up questions posed by the moderator and the questions posed by the journalists during the second segment were directed generally at concerns associated with the particular candidate involved.

Because there were only four candidates instead of six or seven (as was the case in the previous debates), it was easier for viewers to make distinctions among the contenders. The format, however, was rather structured, so that it was difficult for the candidates to really debate one another, they were forced into simply attempting to answer the specific questions posed by journalists and moderator.

While informative, the debate seemed to serve the purpose of a press conference, the principal advantage being that the viewers had an opportunity to contrast answers among candidates to certain questions. Generally speaking, the challenges given to candidates were provided by those asking the questions, not the other contenders. The allowance, once again, for some degree of informality lent to the lessening of an otherwise stiff performance by candidates.

The Illinois Debate

The Illinois Republican Debate, the fourth in the series of televised primary debates, was held on March 13, 1980 at the Continental Plaza Hotel in Chicago. Four Republican candidates participated in the event: Philip Crane, George Bush, Ronald Reagan, and John Anderson. News correspondent Howard K. Smith served as the moderator; there were no panelist questioners for the debate.

The Illinois debate was designed for informal discussion. With the exception of the candidate closing statements, speaking time limits were nonexistent. For the majority of the debate speaking rotation was flexible. The moderator injected questions occassionally; his role in general, was minimal. Subjects were almost always initiated by the moderator. Candidates were permitted to ask their opponents questions and did, in fact, do so. Individual candidate messages varied rather considerably in length, even in terms of a single question.

The ninety-minute debate featured the following four-segment question and answer format: (1) In the initial segment, thirteen questions were asked by the moderator. Some of these were directed to individual candidates rather than the complete group. Questions were focused upon three broad areas, domestic concerns, foreign affairs, and presidential politics. (2) In the second segment, six questions were asked by the moderator, each candidate responding in a set rotation. A response was to be contained within the framework of one sentence, the intent being to get brief position statements on particular issues. (3) In the third segment, three questions were posed by audience members to the candidates, all four contenders responding to

each question in a set rotation. (4) In the final segment, each candidate was given the opportunity to present a one-minute closing statement.

Because of its informal structure, the debate contained an uneven number of responses from the four candidates, with John Anderson providing considerably more comments than his opponents. This was most likely due to the differences in his position statements from those of his three contenders.

The flexibility of the debate format was particularly evident in the first segment. Here candidates frequently confronted their opponents; true debate was probably more prevalent in this segment than in any portion of the other six 1980 debates. Contenders often posed questions to their opponents in this segment, generally in the form of a challenge; these were frequently directed to John Anderson by the three others. Sometimes the moderator directed his questioning in this segment to a single candidate. Frequently, the dialogue became limited to two candidates; the moderator, after a short period of time, interrupted the two candidate interaction.

The moderator stressed his desire in this segment to get at the differences among the candidates, to minimize discussion in areas in which all four of them were in agreement. Not until the second and third debate segments were a variety of issues introduced into the discussion. The initial segment focused upon a very limited number of issues (inflation, the Middle East, ways to deal with Congress, and support of the Republican party nominee), although it was the lengthiest position of the debate. Requesting brief position statements (in this case, in the form of one sentence) of candidates in a set speaking rotation was a unique feature of this debate.

The Texas Debate

The Texas Republican Debate, the fifth in the series of televised primary debates, was held on April 23, 1980 at the Albert Thomas Convention Center in Houston. The two remaining Republican candidates participated in the event: Ronald Reagan and George Bush, two contenders who were later, of course, to join as Republican running mates against the Carter-Mondale ticket. News correspondent Howard K. Smith moderated the debate (as he had in the New Hampshire and Illinois events); there was no panel of questioners for this debate.

The Texas debate offered strong contrast to the other debates involved in this analysis. The moderator played, on the whole, a minimal role in the interaction between the two candidates. The format for the sixty-minute debate provided for relatively open discussion and freedom of direction. Subjects were generally initiated by the moderator, although candidates were free to address questions to one another.

There were no limitations on candidate speaking time during the debate. The only exception was a one-minute limitation imposed upon each candidate for his closing statement. Just prior to these statements, the candidates were given four questions from the audience. At the beginning of the debate the audience was permitted to react audibly to comments of the candidates, but at an early point in the program the moderator advised the audience against reacting to the proceedings. Apparently the format was designed so that (to the degree possible) the debate would appear as a conversation between Reagan and Bush for the benefit of the viewing audience. The staging of the debate, however, was relatively formal. The candidates stood behind podiums on the stage with the moderator between them.

As it turned out, Reagan provided twenty-six candidate messages for a total of approximately twenty-five and a half minutes; Bush offered eighteen candidate messages for a total of approximately nineteen and a half minutes. By not structuring the candidate message plan, Reagan seized the opportunity to speak six more minutes than Bush. However, this was due in part to some questions from the moderator to Reagan about the accuracy of figures he had used in campaign presentations.

Because of the lack of a restricting structure, the candidates had ample time to convey their positions, could attack arguments presented by the opponent, and clarify misconceptions about themselves. This type of format, basically non-directive, seems to allow for maximal comment on issues, particularly when the moderator simply presents topics for discussion, almost in the sense of stating debatable propositions. It is important to note, however, that because the candidates held similar positions on almost every issue, the debate became only minimally confrontational.

The Baltimore Debate

The Baltimore Democratic-Republican Debate, the first of two post-convention presidential debates, was held on September 21, 1980 in the Baltimore Convention Center. Two presidential candidates were present: Ronald Reagan and John Anderson. Bill Moyers of the Public Broadcasting System moderated the program. The format included a panel of six journalists: Carol Loomis, of Fortune Magazine; Daniel Greenberg, a syndicated columnist; Bill Corddry of the Baltimore Sun, Lee May of the Los Angeles Times; Jayne Bryant Quinn of Newsweek Magazine, and Selma Golden of the New York Times.

The one-hour debate featured the following six-segment question and answer format: (1) Six questions were asked of the candidates by the six journalists. (2) The initial respondent (candidate A) was given two and a half minutes to provide an answer. (3) The journalist involved then restated the question. (4) The second respondent (candidate B) was then given two and a half minutes to answer the question. (5) Following this, candidate A was given one minute and fifteen seconds to respond. (6) Candidate B then was given one minute and fifteen seconds to respond. Anderson and Reagan took turns in being the first to respond to a question. Following the six questions, each candidate was provided the opportunity for a three-minute closing statement. Each candidate was, therefore, given twenty-seven minutes to convey his positions.

In contrast to the other debates discussed thus far, this one offered only six questions, possibly minimizing the number of issues which could be brought forth in the interaction. This debate did not feature follow-up questions. Apparently because questioning was confined to this restrictive format, panelists addressed multiple questions to the candidates within the framework of single questions. Rebuttals were possible, however, with four messages (two per candidate) emerging for each question. Some of the questions were rather one-sided and limiting. This debate was quite formal in staging, with the two candidates standing behind podiums and the panel of journalists and the moderator together facing the candidates, their backs to the audience.

The Cleveland Debate

The Cleveland Democratic-Republican debate was held on October 28, 1980 (one week before the General Election) in the Cleveland Convention Center. Two Presidential candidates participated: President Jimmy Carter and former Governor Ronald Reagan. The program included a panel of four journalists: Marvin Stone of U.S. News and World Report, Harry Ellis of the Christian Science Monitor, William Hilliard of the Portland Oregonian, and Barbara Walters of ABC News. Howard K. Smith moderated the debate.

The ninety-minute debate featured a complex three-segment question and answer format: (1) In the initial segment, various questions were posed by the journalists to the candidates, with the question going to candidate A, then a response from candidate A, then a follow-up question, then a response from candidate A. At this point the question was restated to candidate B, followed by a response from candidate B, a follow-up question, then a response from candidate B. Finally, a rebuttal was presented by each candidate (first from candidate A and then from candidate B, (2) In the second segment, the same procedure was used, with the omission of follow-up questions. (3) In the final segment, three-minute closing statements were provided by each candidate. As with the Baltimore debate, time limitations were imposed upon all speaking opportunity of the candidates. Carter and Reagan took turns in being the initial respondent to questions.

Each question in the first and second parts of the debates offered the candidates each three opportunities to speak. Rebuttals were a feature of the first two debate segments, follow-up questions were only a feature of the

initial segment. Two rebuttals per candidate were possible in the second segment because an additional rebuttal replaced the follow-up question that had been included in the first segment of the debate.[9] This additional opportunity for rebuttal gave the candidates a chance to reaffirm or clarify their positions, respond to specific comments made by their opponent, and make further points in regard to an issue.

Four principle questions were posed in the initial segment, each accompanied by a follow-up question. In the second segment, another four questions were asked. In essence, then, eight principal questions were posed by the journalists, two by each panelist. Once again, the journalists were unable to resist the temptation to formulate multiple questions within a format that required single questions.

The format of the Carter-Reagan debate created an extremely formal atmosphere, similar to that found in the Reagan-Anderson debate. Both of these forums were staged in the tradition of the presidential debates of 1960 and 1976. The panelists and the moderator in the Cleveland debate faced the two candidates, with their backs to the audience. The two contenders stood behind podiums on the stage with a blue curtain behind them. No audience reaction was permitted during the course of the debate. Candidates were allowed to use only those notes that they composed during the course of the debate.

The advantages of follow-up questions and rebuttals were evidenced in the information provided in the debate by the candidates. Though the panelists questions were catalytic in nature, there still was a sense that the candidates

were answering the journalists' questions, rather than debating one another. This debate offered the candidates substantially more speaking time than did the one in Baltimore; the Cleveland debate was ninety minutes in length, the Baltimore debate was sixty minutes in length.

Summary

The purpose of this article has been to compare and contrast the formats employed in all seven of the 1980 televised presidential debates and to thus discuss the issue of debate formats in general.

Since the format imposed upon a debate can affect the presentation of information provided to viewers and since the presidential debates have become a significant event in the campaign process, it is important to analyze various optional formats and to consider carefully formats which are developed for future such encounters.

Upon examination of the 1980 debates, the range of formats becomes clear. The rigidity and structure of the two post-convention debates seem in line with the importance of the bi-partisan electoral events with which they were associated. The earlier Republican primary debates would seem to have had the luxury of being more flexible, experimental, and informal. Ironically, the potential for confrontation between candidates because of party affiliation could be lesser in the primary debates than in the bi-partisan encounters, although the unstructured formats, as evidenced at least in the 1980 primary debates, could offer greater confrontational discussion through their informality and lack of strict regimentation.

It is difficult to determine which debate format offered the most information to its viewers. Some of these debate formats provided for interference by the panelists. Indeed, the panelists almost became third parties in some forums. The Texas debate certainly offered the candidates the most freedom from interference by panelists. In a few debates, intimidating questions pervaded the forums, producing defensive and evasive responses from the candidates. Worn commonplaces were an outcome, to some degree, in each of the debates. In all cases except the Texas and Illinois debates, the restricted format and the absence of clearly stated propositions caused the candidates to be more concerned with answering a journalist's question than actually debating one another.

In making recommendations for future debates, several considerations emerge. These events need to be designed in such a way as to minimize the involvement of panelists beyond what is necessary to pose propositions through their questions. Panelists certainly should be discouraged from using intimidating or multiple-faceted questions, as these cannot be translated into clear and fairly stated propositions. The "shot-gun" presentation of questions used in press conferences does not seem preferable in debates. The debate questions should be simple, short and direct. Ideally, each question ought to clearly imply a debatable proposition.

Multiple questions emerged particularly in the two post-convention debates; at the same time, the formats of these debates allowed for fewer opportunities to pose a question than in the primary debates. Obviously, a type of trade-off occurred in the 1980 debates: frequent questions created shorter response times and encouraged a press conference format; less frequent

questions encouraged the panelists to hide several questions within the guise of a single question and then made it very difficult for the candidates to present responsive answers within a set time frame. Regrettably, questions in most of the debates analyzed here were often tailored to the initial respondent. This lead to one-sided questioning which discouraged a genuine debate among the candidates. Obviously, this practice needs to be avoided in future debate formats. Future debates also need to be designed so as to minimize the stiff quality of past debates. Such a change might lessen the tendency of the press and the public at large to view the debates as contests between candidates to see who is the most facile.

There appears to be somewhat of a trade-off between informal and formal debate formats. The informal format can provide the least opportunity for a candidate to "hide" within the structure of a debate so as to evade or ignore open discussion of a complex issue. This was clearly illustrated in the first segment of the Illinois debate in which the four contenders participated in a very candid exchange of views, challenging one another frequently. The informal format, however, legislates the least; control of the interaction in terms of speaking time and speaking rotation is not strictly imposed. A candidate engaged in informal debate has no guarantee that he will have an equal opportunity with his opponent(s) to convey his positions or express counterarguments. A formal structure offers a candidate at least assurance of equal speaking opportunities with his opponent(s). The informal option would probably not be a likely choice in the bi-partisan encounter, since so much is at stake for the candidates. To

promote more open issue oriented discussion, the formal structure must allow for sufficient rebuttal time (as the Cleveland debate seemed to do) and minimal interference by panelists asking the questions.

Closing statements appear to be an effective device for summarizing what has taken place. Opening statements offer another opportunity for setting the tone of the debate. Opening statements were employed in two of the four Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960 and in the 1976 Vice Presidential debate between Walter Mondale and Robert Dole. Certainly, the restatement of questions was a positive innovation in the 1980 debates, as it refocused attention on the query, helped avoid ambiguity and fostered a debate on the proposition implicit in the question. Multiple opportunities for rebuttals (provided, for example, in the Cleveland debate) are preferrable if a structured format is to be imposed.

Finally,allowing the moderator to introduce various propositions formulated in advance during the debate itself has been suggested by several scholars as a way to improve the debate formats.[9] In this way, the contenders might debate more with one another, with the propositions being the vehicle for initiating interaction, rather than questions, and with the moderator monitoring the interaction, rather than a panelist of journalists, who have had a tendency to play too large a role in the process of presidential debating.

The experience of presidential campaign debates in 1980 has provided a wider range of formats from which to choose or modify in the future. The forums in Iowas and New Hampshire provided models for incorporating six or seven candidates into a debate format, while the South Carolina and

Illinois debates provided for four contenders. The most interesting contrasts in formats occurred among the three two-person debates held in Texas, Baltimore and Cleveland. Of course, any format can be misused or abused--whether by the candidates, the moderator, or the panelists. The goal is not to find a "perfect" format for presidential debates, but rather to develop appropriate and productive formats for different campaign situations. Given the innovations of the 1980 forums, there is reason to hope that future presidential debates will employ improved formats and that public argument--however imperfect--will continue to play an important role in American politics.

FOOTNOTES

[1]See, for example, Frank Stanton, "An Appeal to the American People," TV Guide, January 14-20, 1961, p.26; and John P. Robinson, "The Polls" in The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976 ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 262-268.

[2]See, for example, Steven H. Chaffee, "Presidential Debates--Are They Helpful to Voters?" Communication Monographs, 45 (1978), 330-346.

[3]See, for example, Sidney Kraus, ed., The Great Debates: Background--Perspective--Effects (Kennedy vs. Nixon) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); Kraus, The Great Debates (Carter-Ford); and Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter, Carter vs. Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

[4]See, for example, Jim Karayn, "Presidential Debates: A Plan for the Future," in The Great Debates (Carter-Ford), pp. 209-219; Bitzer and Rueter, Carter vs. Ford, pp. 193-250; Sidney Kraus, "Presidential Debates in 1964," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 50 (1964), 19-23; Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, "Presidential Debates: An Overview," in The Past and Future of Presidential Debates, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979) pp. 191-214; and David Sendler, "A New Plan for Presidential Debates," TV Guide, March 8, 1980, pp. 4-10.

[5]See Bitzer and Rueter, Carter vs. Ford, p. 225, as well as other sources cited in note 4.

[6]The term "worn commonplaces" has been adopted for this discussion from Bitzer and Rueter, Carter vs. Ford, pp. 132-135.

[7]John Anderson, of course, eventually parted from his Republican colleagues, but he continued to contribute to the image of a united Republican Party until the Illinois debate.

[8]The following analysis of debate formats is based upon video-tapes of the television broadcasts for all but the New Hampshire debate which was reviewed through audio-tape and the Illinois debate which was reviewed through the provision of a transcript by the League of Women Voters.

[9]Germond and Witcover, "Presidential Debates: An Overview," p. 201; and Kraus, "Presidential Debates in 1964," p. 22.